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ABSTRACT

This paper uses St. Philips College in San Antonio, Texas, as a model for community colleges facing the challenge of meeting expanded academic and leadership expectations with ever-shrinking budgets. The authors offer suggestions for ways to maintain high-quality instruction, management, and support. The authors present the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's (NIOSH) list of six workplace conditions that may lead to stress: (1) Design of Tasks (which may include a heavy workload or routine tasks with little inherent meaning); (2) Management Style (which may include poor communication); (3) Interpersonal Relations (which may include lack of support or help from coworkers and supervisors; (4) Work Roles (including too much responsibility); (5) Career Concerns (including job insecurity); and (6) Environmental Conditions (including unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions). St. Philip's used these finding to explore working conditions at the college and to determine if professional development could aid in addressing the problems. As a result, the college instituted a professional development program called Pathways to Excellence that was designed to address all the NIOSH stressors--with the exception of Environmental Conditions, which was approached via other avenues. (Contains 14 references.) (Author/NB)

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Professional Development in the Community College: Pathways to Excellence

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Abstract

Community colleges facing the challenge of meeting expanded academic and leadership expectations with ever shrinking dollars struggle with ways to maintain high quality instruction, management, and support. This paper, presented at the 2002 Instructional Conference on Teaching and Leadership Excellence sponsored by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development examines ways in which a community college can set itself on a pathway to excellence by focusing on professional development, by recognizing and utilizing the talents within its own ranks, and by creating a lifelong learning culture throughout the institution's staff and faculty. St. Philip's College in San Antonio, Texas was used as a model.

Introduction

Most community colleges struggle with meeting increasingly complex financial, academic, student support, technology, and physical space challenges. Of great concern to many college leaders is the risk of "burning out" their best and brightest faculty and staff by asking them to do more and more with less and less. A seriously overtaxed faculty and staff can cause severe damage to the college climate and ultimately can cause an institution to fail in meeting its goals.

According to the article *Sources of Workplace Stress* published by the Canadian Centre for Occupational Safety and Health (1997-2002), employees who feel they are under constant 'pressure to perform' can suffer greatly as they "get caught in a downward spiral of increasing effort to meet rising expectations with no increase in job satisfaction". Community college leaders have a responsibility to address excessive workplace stress not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is critical to the long term health and growth of their institutions. To set out on a positive course toward excellence, institutions should consider addressing workplace stress through a comprehensive professional development program available to all employees.

Recognizing Barriers to Excellence

In order for a community college to meet its goal of academic excellence, a committed leadership at the top of the organization along with a highly dedicated and skilled faculty and support staff must be ready and willing to perform with an intensity of purpose. An expectation of sustained high quality performance on the part of faculty and staff inevitably generates stress. Though it is generally believed that some stress is necessary to motivate individuals to perform (positive stress), when stress occurs in such high amounts that individual employees lose the ability to perform their jobs effectively, an organization suffers (Sources of stress, 1997-2002). College leaders who are devoted to the goal of academic excellence must pay close attention to the need of faculty and staff to function in a healthy environment.

Locke and Taylor (1990) promote what they call a balanced approach to understanding work stress. A balanced approach requires a recognition that employment provides rewards that are both intrinsic and extrinsic, (e.g., skill development, self-esteem, money, social contacts, and personal identity). Many colleges are challenged to find substantive extrinsic rewards such as extra financial compensation or extended travel opportunities for faculty and staff. Intrinsic rewards may not cost as much, but colleges must think creatively to make these kinds of rewards meaningful.

In 1999, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (Sauter, et al, 1999) published a document stating the following:

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- A healthy work environment is essential for the long-term growth and credibility of any institution.

- A healthy work environment is free from excessive job induced stressors.

The NIOSH report identified six workplace conditions that may lead to excessive stress.

1. Design of Tasks
   - Heavy workload, infrequent rest breaks, long work hours
   - Hectic and/or routine tasks that have little inherent meaning, do not utilize workers' skills, provide little sense of control

2. Management Style
   - Lack of participation in decision-making
   - Poor communication in the organization

3. Interpersonal Relationships
   - Poor social environment
   - Lack of support or help from coworkers and supervisors

4. Work Roles
   - Conflicting or uncertain job expectations
   - Too much responsibility
   - Too many "hats to wear"

5. Career Concerns
   - Job insecurity and lack of opportunity for growth, advancement, or promotion
   - Rapid changes for which workers are unprepared

6. Environmental Conditions.
   - Unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions such as crowding, noise, air pollution, or ergonomic problems

Leadership within St. Philip's College in San Antonio, Texas reviewed these stressors and realized that many of the institution's staff and faculty probably suffer with one or more of these stressors. A thoughtful assessment of the NIOSH stress conditions makes it clear that many of these workplace stressors can be addressed through professional development and training.

St. Philip's College Campus Profile

St. Philip's College has undergone enormous changes and has addressed considerable challenges over the 104 years of its existence. Though a highly successful institution, current challenges are such that the college needs all of its faculty and staff to perform at its optimum. To better understand the issues facing the college and at least one response the college has to those challenges, a profile of the institution is appropriate.

St. Philip's College originally was located in the historic La Villita district in downtown San Antonio. It began as a small sewing school for young black girls in 1896 and became a post-secondary school in 1898. At that time it was a private institution with roots in the Episcopal Church. The college became a public institution in 1945 when it joined the San Antonio Union Junior College District. It has since evolved into one of the fastest growing community colleges in the country starting with 27 students in the fall of 1898 to 4,897 in the fall of 1988 and to over 10,0000 in the spring of 2002.

St. Philip's is a part of the Alamo Community College District and is a comprehensive community college with fully accredited programs in the Arts and Sciences, Applied Science and Technology, degree and certificate programs, and well as continued education and workforce development programs. It is a multi-campus institution with sites located on the main campus on the east side of San Antonio, the Southwest Campus on the former Kelly Air Force Base, and the Northeast Campus located just north of the main campus. St. Philip's College is the only institution of higher education in the nation that holds both Historically Black and Hispanic Serving designations. These designations attest to the diversity of the campus student body, the faculty, and the staff as well as to the changing demographics of the area the college serves.

The chart below illustrates the great diversity of St. Philip's student body as well as the significant academic and economic challenges facing most of the institution's students.

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St. Philip's College Student Profile (Fall 2001)

- Average age: 27
- 44% Male, 56% Female
- 35% Full-time, 65% Part-time
- 18% Black, 29% White, 50% Hispanic, 2% Other
- 12% Veterans, 6% Military
- 42% Academically Disadvantaged*
- 59% Economically Disadvantaged *
- 24% First Time in College
- **97% First Time in College require remediation**

Source: St. Philip's College Fall 2001 Mini Fact Book

** As defined by Public Community/Junior Colleges Performance Measure Definitions, Texas Legislative Budget*

- *Academically Disadvantaged: students who do not have college level skills as evidenced by the TASP or other placement test.*
- *Economically Disadvantaged: students whose expected family contribution is zero on the financial aid database, or who qualifies for other public assistance programs.*

Challenges to Excellence

According to the 2001 issue of Community College Week's Special Report on the Fastest Growing Community Colleges, St. Philip's ranks as the 23rd fastest growing institution of its size in the nation with a 17% increase in students between Fall 94 and Fall 99. Since 1991, enrollment figures for St. Philip's College have increased 63%, new campuses have been added, a multitude of off-campus sites have been established, and several new buildings have been constructed. However, even with a 63% increase in enrollment since 1991, a corresponding increase in faculty and budget has not been forthcoming. Full-time faculty positions have increased by only 14% and budget expenditures have only jumped 22% (St. Philip's College Department of Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness, 2002). In spite of these challenges, St. Philip's has maintained and even enhanced its academic excellence.

In 1999, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board recognized 21 academic and support programs for excellence (St. Philip's College Department of Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness, 1999). SuperOnda Magazine in spring of 2000 identified St. Philip's College as number two in the nation among community colleges serving Hispanic students (SuperOnda, 2000). A study in 2001 by Southwest Texas State University showed that St. Philip's College transfer students to Southwest Texas State University performed better in average GPA than all other two-year Texas college transfers after their first year with an average GPA of 2.63 versus an average of 2.50 for all other two-year Texas college transfers. In addition, St. Philip's students were more likely to continue their studies at Southwest Texas State University than other transfer students (Southwest Texas, 2001).

The maintenance of high standards and a dedication to academic integrity and rigor are cornerstones to St. Philip's mission. Supporting these goals in the face of ever-tightening budgets is an ongoing challenge to the college's leadership. Clearly the only way to deal with the growth, while at the same time maintaining academic excellence, is to do more with less. But how can an institution continue to do more with less without at the same time "burning out" its most capable faculty and staff? To answer this question, St. Philip's began to study the ramifications of ongoing negative stress in the workplace and began to implement a thoughtful response to address those concerns.

In reviewing the NIOSH documentation of workplace stress St. Philip's leadership applied the findings to the college and began to explore specific stressors that could be addressed through professional development with a minimal amount of financial resources while at the same time providing intrinsic rewards for faculty and staff.

Professional development needs and opportunities were explored campus-wide through a variety of assessment measures. A SPC Employee Development Needs Assessment Survey (2001) was administered in the Spring of 2001 to determine the diverse training and professional development needs of all St. Philip's College employees and to cull ideas on how those needs could be addressed most effectively. Specifically, the survey was designed to identify gaps in the college's professional development offerings. In addition to the formal survey, findings in ongoing internal training and professional development evaluations were analyzed along with information obtained through informal interviews with deans and department heads.

The overall findings indicated that faculty and staff wanted more opportunities to improve their work skills, to learn new technologies, to develop leadership abilities, and to participate in meaningful dialog with their peers about their personal perspectives on the meaning of work in a learning institution. The college classified these findings into four categories: teaching and learning, technical skills building, leadership development, and personal development. These diverse professional development needs and wants of the St. Philip's faculty and staff called for the college to create several pathways for employee growth and achievement. The development of the pathways was coordinated through the college's Instructional Innovation Center.

Planning Pathways to Excellence

In August of 2001, St. Philip's unveiled the *Journey to Excellence* professional development plan at the annual *All-College Meeting*. *Journey to Excellence* formed an umbrella

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for other programs such as *Master Teacher Certification, Employee Development Day, Teaching Excellence in Distance Learning, Chairs and Directors Workshop, Adjunct Faculty Development Day, Leadership Development Series, Heart of Learning Dialogs* and more. Some of these programs already existed at the college and a few new programs were added. The various programs were then grouped into a series of professional development pathways including *Teaching and Learning, Technical Skill Building, Leadership Development* and *Personal Growth*. All *Journey to Excellence* programs primarily used the talents and skills of existing staff and faculty, providing them with college recognition and igniting a sense of lifelong learning among the broader college community.

The theme of *Journey to Excellence* was *Improving my Skills, Renewing my Spirit, Practicing my Craft*. Under the umbrella, five of the six NIOSH workplace stressors were addressed: **design of tasks, management style, interpersonal relationships, work roles,** and **career concerns**. It was determined that environmental concerns should be addressed under a separate venue. The plan to address NIOSH stress issues through existing and new training and professional development programs proved to be a relatively easy prospect. In fact the NIOSH study actually helped form the content and structure of several programs.

At the beginning of the 2001 academic year, each employee was provided a *Journey to Excellence Planner* that included a college academic calendar as well as a full calendar of internal training opportunities in technical skill building, teaching and learning, leadership development, and personal development. The planner also included information on the individuals who would be providing the various training workshops, access information to online tutorials, registration information, and importantly, a personal development plan. The personal development plan was composed of a single statement: "This year I want to build and/or improve my skills in the following areas:" It was anticipated that faculty and staff would work with their chairs/supervisors to identify specific workshops, dates and times to participate in a variety of professional development offerings. Since the information was made available to all college employees at the beginning of the fall semester, chairs and supervisors were better able to plan for faculty/staff participation in professional development activities throughout the academic year. The same information in the *Journey to Excellence Planner* was provided in web format as well on the college website for easy online access and registration. The cost of the printing the planner came to about one dollar per copy.

One objective of the *Journey to Excellence Planner* was to simply provide all faculty and staff with easy access to internal professional development information. A second objective of the planner was to lay the groundwork for individuals to embark upon their own path of growth and excellence. A final objective was to impart upon all employees a sense of value and a knowledge that they were important to the institution and that the institution wanted to help them grow and flourish. Anecdotal evidence by word of mouth tended to support the belief that the planner met its objectives, however a formal study has not yet been conducted.

Pathways to Excellence

The following is a brief synopsis of each of the professional development "pathways to excellence" delivered during the 2001-2002 academic year at St. Philip's College. All identified NIOSH stressors were addressed in each of the associated programs with the exception of **Environmental Conditions**. This stressor was addressed via avenues other than professional development. Since the majority of the pathways used existing staff and faculty members, the primary cost of the various programs was printing for handouts averaging about one dollar per participant per program.

Pathways to Excellence

- Teaching and Learning
- Technical Skill-Building
- Leadership Development
- Personal Growth

Teaching and Learning Pathways

Distinct programs within the Teaching and Learning Pathways component of St. Philip's professional development program include *Master Teacher Certification, Teaching Excellence in Distance Learning, Master Teacher Connections* and the *Adjunct Faculty Mini-Conference*.

The *Master Teacher* program was designed as a 14-hour seminar whereby participants actively engage in reflective and creative exercises and dialogs to improve their own teaching. Areas of discussion include course planning, learner-centered instruction, and assessment strategies. Faculty members apply key components of effective course planning to existing and new curricula, identify learner-centered instructional strategies, create their own curriculum based on learner-centered principles, and become familiar with recent trends in classroom assessment. Faculty determine alternative assessment tools to augment, or in some cases even replace, traditional modes of assessment. Though the content of the program is extremely practical and rich with specific examples, the real value of the program evolves from the interpersonal and surprisingly frank dialogs among faculty members of various disciplines. It is the dialog that makes the participants feel a part of a meaningful and shared goal.

Master Teacher Connections provides Master Teachers with additional professional development opportunities to enhance their teaching/learning experience. The

Connections program is a series of 2-hour workshops addressing topics such as critical thinking skills, active learning, problem solving and group learning activities. Instructional Innovation Center staff and volunteer faculty members facilitate these two-hour sessions.

The *Teaching Excellence in Distance Learning* (TEDL), program got its start from an internal mini-grant incentive. The initial pilot program was designed to assist faculty members in converting traditional course materials and experiences into an interactive online environment. The TEDL curriculum was developed to address pedagogical, classroom management, and technical needs of distance learning faculty so that they may in turn apply contemporary learning theory and application to Internet-based courses. The successful pilot is now a required program for all faculty members who intend to teach or develop Internet courses. Individual workshops are facilitated by the college's Instructional Innovation Center and by district staff trainers.

Adjunct faculty members are a critically important component of most community college instructional teams. Providing meaningful professional development opportunities for part-time faculty is essential to the maintenance of academic integrity within individual programs and to the overall growth of the institution. One early Saturday morning in the spring of 2002, St. Philip's College hosted its first *Adjunct Faculty Mini-Conference*. The highly successful event provided adjuncts with a half-day of learning opportunities related to curriculum development and delivery, teaching strategies, and the use of various technologies to enhance learning. The event closed with an open forum designed to identify gaps in the college's support of adjuncts. The facilitated dialog revealed several areas that the college could address to improve the conditions under which adjunct faculty work.

The NIOSH stressors addressed in Teaching and Learning Pathways included **Design of Tasks** where faculty members learn to exhibit greater control over the content and delivery of their courses and more importantly, seek a higher purpose to their endeavors beyond simply "delivering material." It also addressed needs related to **Interpersonal Relationships** and a feeling of belonging to the institution. Instructional Innovation Center staff members facilitated the program with substantial assistance by the academic deans and vice president of academic affairs. The success of the Teaching and Learning Pathways was measured in the 125 plus full-time faculty members and 50 plus adjunct faculty members who have voluntarily participated in at least one of the programs since the fall of 1998.

Technical Skill-Building Pathways

All employees need training in various technical applications whether they are learning a program for the first time or they just need to hone particular skills. St. Philip's began offering free software applications training to all college employees in 1998. The purpose of the training initially was to help employees build technical skills so that they could be more productive workers. While that is still the case, within the *Journey to Excellence* program it also has become an important factor in building confidence levels within individual employees to perform more advanced, complex applications that in turn help their departments and the college as a whole. Specific technology-based professional development includes training opportunities in Microsoft applications, Adobe multimedia products, Macromedia and other Web development applications, as well as course development tools such as WebCT. In addition to software, technical training includes use of hardware peripherals such as scanners, digital cameras, and CD recorders. Instructional Innovation Center and Instructional Technologies along with district personnel deliver almost all technical training programs.

NIOSH stressors addressed in the Technical Skill Building pathway include **Career Concerns** and **Interpersonal Relationships**. According to Sauter, et al (1999), job insecurity and lack of opportunity for growth or advancement are major stressors that have a profoundly negative impact on employees and hence, productivity. By encouraging staff and faculty to participate in technical skill-building training, and doing so in an open, collegial environment, these negative stressors can be turned around. Though participation in technical training does not automatically result in job advancement, the development of marketable skills improves an individual's opportunity to be promoted.

Leadership Development Pathways

Most institutions have a need for staff members to continuously improve their "soft" skills and to move forward into more complex areas of job responsibility. However, few community colleges take formal steps to provide learning opportunities for those individuals already in leadership or who want to be in leadership positions. St. Philip's Instructional Innovation Center developed monthly brown bag luncheons to provide staff members with active learning leadership experiences using the case study model.

In the 2001-2002 academic year, participants in the *Leadership Development Program* explored common problems faced by supervisors including time management, conducting effective meetings, conflict resolution, team building, and motivating staff. Because the sessions were interactive by design and required critical thinking skills on the part of the participants, graduates of the program left each session with practical skills and useful ideas about effective ways of dealing with various issues. The 2001-2002 academic year was a pilot program, and because of its success, it will be continued into the next academic year.

Specific NIOSH stressors addressed in this program include **Design of Tasks, Management Style, Interpersonal Relationships, Work Roles** and **Career Concerns**.

In addition to the new *Leadership Development Program*, St. Philip's continued with its tradition of the Annual Chairs Workshop. The one and a half day event was held at the end of the Spring 2002 semester and was directed to new as well as seasoned department chairs. The workshop specifically addressed the same five NIOSH stressors as the *Leadership Development Program*. The workshop began with the college administration giving verbal accolades for the many departmental achievements over the past year and thanking the chairs for their hard work and dedication to the growth of the college.

This segment was followed with brief presentations by two outside presenters who spoke about the importance of the chair to the success of an institution. These two components of the workshop set the tone for the remainder of the event, reinforcing how valuable the chair is to the whole of the organization. The presentations were followed by case study activities whereby chairs worked individually and in groups to address a couple of "real life" and very sticky situations relating to the academic integrity of a course and the academic freedom of a faculty member. The case study activity allowed the chairs to see a myriad of ways a problem could be addressed and how their individual decisions could decide a positive, negative, or reasonably acceptable outcome. They saw first-hand how to **Design Tasks** effectively and how to implement a **Management Style** conducive to a more cohesive environment. Working with peers across disciplines helped build a sense of collegiality that addressed **Interpersonal Relationship** needs.

Personal Growth Pathways

Beyond developing specific workplace skills and strategies, the college believes that nurturing the individual to pursue internal growth opportunities is essential. This belief is so strong that it is an integral component of the St. Philip's College value statement (2001). In creating a pathway for faculty and staff to pursue personal growth opportunities, the college redesigned its annual *Employee Development Day* to address more immediate needs of staff. The spring 2002 event was entitled *Taking Care of Myself to Care for Others* and was highlighted by an engaging presentation by a recognized motivational speaker. After the keynote presentation, staff members joined random groups of peers to dialog about critical everyday issues relating to interpersonal relationships and managing day to day frustrations. Staff volunteers facilitated the peer groups. Specific topics included:

I. I'd Love my Job if it weren't for all Those Students! *Interpersonal Skills*

II. The Great Paper Chase or There's Got to be a Better Way! *Managing paperwork and processes*

III. That's Not What I Meant! *Effective Communication*

IV. Can't we all Just Get Along? *Conflict Resolution*

Ideas about how to create a less stressful working environment were actively exchanged among all levels of staff and the ideas were compiled and are in the process of being formatted to be shared with the full campus community. Though several NIOSH stressors were addressed in this event, the main focus was on the development of **Interpersonal Relationships**. Event evaluations confirmed that this model (motivational speaker followed by purposeful peer dialogs) was an effective way to bring together diverse entities within the college community to work toward a shared purpose.

The *Heart of Learning Discussion Group* formed in the fall of 2000 when a small group of faculty and staff began meeting in the college's Instructional Innovation Center to discuss essays and articles related to the spiritual aspects of teaching and learning. In the 2001-2002 academic year, these dialogs were scheduled on a monthly basis and placed in the *Journey to Excellence* planner inviting anyone within the college community to participate. Since that time, the discussion group continues to grow and evolve, evidence that it is addressing both personal and **Interpersonal Relationship** needs. A key aim of this Personal Growth Ppathway is that individual faculty and staff members begin to develop and/or nurture a true sense of purpose in their work lives, regardless of their position within the institution.

Concluding Remarks

Without a healthy workforce, an institution cannot maintain a high level of quality instructional and student support. A healthy workforce is dependent upon a college climate that is nurturing and supportive and is relatively free of excessive stressors. St. Philip's College has attempted to create this type of climate through the design and implementation of professional development pathways within their *Journey to Excellence* umbrella program. Though the college does not enjoy an overabundance of financial resources, the cost to implement a comprehensive professional development plan has been kept to a minimum by utilizing existing talents with the college's pool of faculty and staff members. Though a formal study of the overall effectiveness of professional development at St. Philip's College has not yet been conducted, both quantitative and qualitative evaluations along with anecdotal evidence from individual programs within the professional

development plan indicate a high level of participation and satisfaction among faculty and staff.

As financial and other outside stressors continue to place pressures upon educational institutions, colleges must learn new ways to be productive. One way may be to address the needs of faculty and staff members to work in a healthy, positive environment. By focusing on the individual., colleges can create pathways for employees to embark upon their own journeys to excellence, something that can only be good for the institution.

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